



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

A FRENCH SCHOOLMASTER'S METHOD OF TEACHING LATIN¹

FRANCES E. SABIN
University of Wisconsin

While there is nothing new for the wide-awake American teacher of secondary Latin in this message of 424 pages from a French schoolmaster, it is at the same time encouraging for him to know that "somewhere in France" the really vital points of successful teaching, which he has always been trying to emphasize in his own work, are so frankly recognized and so completely set forth as they are in this book. To the young teacher who has not yet found himself, the words of Monsieur Bezard should bring much that is rich in the way of suggestion. For, while the ideals and the course of procedure which the author outlines are not possible of achievement as a whole in the average American public high school of today, they still embody the principles of success in all teaching of secondary Latin in America, and, in so far as they can be adapted to the modern high school, an insistence upon them is bound to contribute largely to the teacher's success. Before giving concrete examples of M. Bezard's mode of procedure in a typical French high school of the better class, it may be well to summarize the striking points of his pedagogy as they appear to a reviewer of the book:

1. A zest for the scientific study of the profession under the only conditions that lead to practical results—actual experience with high-school pupils, whose reaction is the dominant factor in leading to conclusions.
2. A willingness to open his mind to the facts of childhood and to adapt his methods to these. Whatever assists him in achieving his end of thoroughness he is quick to seize upon. He has no

¹ *Comment apprendre le Latin à nos fils.* By J. Bezard. Paris: Librairie Vuibert. Pp. 424. 3 fr. 50c.

scorn for the "contest" or the "game," if it leads to the desired end more quickly than any other way.

3. A recognition of the important part that the tangible and concrete play in the acquisition of knowledge during the period of youth.

4. Paramount emphasis upon the idea of selecting a definite amount of material to be learned—and that, of course, the most essential—rather than trying to cover the whole field of Latin grammar, "*Le minimum indispensable que l'élève doit savoir d'une manière imperturbable.*"

5. An insistence upon repetition as an important factor in successful teaching.

6. A clear perception of the fact that pupils are interested in Latin in proportion to their power to succeed in it, and that, in consequence, assignments that are obviously beyond their ability are not only unfair, but pedagogically wrong, leading inevitably to discouragement and negligence. To make it possible for the pupil to master the advance lesson, a certain amount of preliminary work should be undertaken in class—much more, by the way, than the average teacher thinks necessary.

7. A recognition of the value of working with the pupils in a real "Latin laboratory," helping them, for example, to prepare the notebooks, charts, etc., and making them feel the enthusiasm that personal contact in such co-operative work between teacher and pupils is sure to bring.

8. A severity in maintaining high standards of achievement even at the cost of eliminating the weak, "*Il faudrait être unpitoyable*"—a sentiment which seems to point to a belief that only the fit should survive.

The story of M. Bezard's experiment, as he calls it, runs as follows: An instructor in the Senior year of a French high school, he became dissatisfied with the results in Latin teaching as he saw them, and, together with several sympathetic colleagues, determined to make use of the classroom for a period of several months as a laboratory for certain experiments, or for "a series of clinics" where defects might be discovered and appropriate remedies applied. To keep the evidence first hand, the material is arranged largely

in the form of dialogues in which the actual conversation between pupil and teacher is given. This gives a freshness of tone to the whole discussion and makes the reader feel that the facts are, indeed, as close to nature as those with which the biologist works in his scientific laboratory. There is not a teacher who has any professional instinct who has not many times felt the charm and usefulness of this way of learning how to teach Latin.

Having gone into the first-year classroom, M. Bezard finds that he cannot leave out of account the work of the year before in preparing the pupil, through the study of French grammar, for beginning Latin. His insistence that the child come to the Latin class well grounded in the simple principles of syntax, and the responsibility that he expects the parents to assume in this connection are amusing to the American teacher who has long ago ceased to expect such preparation and, when he is fortunate enough to find a pupil who, by reason of the hard work of some sensible (and so-called "old-fashioned") grade-school teacher, is able to tell the difference between the active and passive voice, counts himself happy.

Feeling that much of the haziness in the mind of the pupil comes from the lack of the concrete in instruction, M. Bezard devises what he calls "tools" for the use of pupils. These consist of the following:

1. Declension and conjugation charts prepared by the pupils of the first year, either by cutting up old grammars and pasting the material upon the cards, or by printing it, with the object of having these essentials before the pupils always, in visible, concrete form.

2. A vocabulary notebook (although its preparation is optional) which at the end of the first year is discarded for a permanent one to continue throughout the pupil's Latin course, in which all words are noted alphabetically as they are met, with the primary meaning given first and derived meanings later. A space of several lines is left for the words of the same family to be added later as they are met. Sometimes, in order to fix the meaning, a famous quotation is added, as "Veni, vidi, vici," or the opposite of some word is given, such as "inimicus" in connection with "hostis." No word is allowed to be written in the vocabulary notebook until it has

been thoroughly learned, and pages are assigned so often for recitation that they become a permanent part of the pupil's mental equipment. That the expenditure of time required to make these books is really economy of effort in the long run is the almost universal testimony of the pupils, who seem to hate a slavish dependence upon the lexicon as much as does the teacher. One dislikes to think of the tragedy of losing this book so laboriously compiled and containing so much that is personal! But perhaps the phrase so well known to the American teacher, "I left it in my locker and now it isn't there," is never heard in the well-regulated schoolroom in France.

3. Large wall charts containing an outline of the essential points of Latin syntax, less in amount and clearer in presentation than the treatment in the average grammar.

4. A syntax notebook containing an outline of essential points as worked out by the teacher and written on the even pages of an individual notebook. On the opposite pages of the same the pupil collects examples from his reading. M. Bezard is insistent upon the memorizing of sample sentences in illustration of the various principles, a point of pedagogy which is no longer popular in the American schools of education.

After a discussion of these "tools of work," M. Bezard proceeds to show their application to the daily work and, most interesting of all, the way in which the pupil is taken into the teacher's confidence, so that he gladly contributes his bit of evidence as to the effectiveness of the plan in question.

Probably the chapters which deal with the management of a prose exercise and translation are as interesting as any in the book. The American teacher will marvel at the excellence of the results in the writing of prose, which, in the opinion of the author, is designed only to give a pupil "control" of information gained, and he will be inclined to wonder if the same results could be obtained in our average public high school under a similar method.

But they would be vastly improved at any rate if the central point of M. Bezard's system were insisted upon—namely, not to ask pupils to write prose until the words and principles have been thoroughly mastered. This very careful advance study of the

exercise is a revelation to many high-school teachers who expect results by simply assigning the sentences for the next day. Oral reading plays a large part in the conduct of the prose work, the pupil often reading the French sentence which the instructor gives in Latin, after which the pupil, with the French alone before him, reads the same in Latin.

The method of attacking the problem of translation is next discussed at length. The same thoroughness is shown in preparing the class to meet the difficulties in the text. The procedure is as follows: The passage is first read in Latin to discover the thought as a whole. The text is then divided into divisions and subdivisions for special study of the sentence structure in which the "parsing" of each and every possible word plays a large part. Then, little by little, passing from one word to another in the order of the Latin, the meaning of the sentence is brought out and the whole finally translated into perfect French. The vocabulary and syntax notebooks are continually in use to fix the ideas, although as students advance in the course they are naturally less vital because of the larger number of words and syntactical ideas already in the possession of the pupil. The home study is largely concerned with memorizing the content of the vocabulary and syntax notebooks which bear upon a special lesson, reviewing the points brought in up advance, and working over the material as a whole.

The last part of the book is given up to the literary interpretation of the text, with special reference to the reaction on the pupil. The effect of Virgil, for example, upon the pupil is discussed at length. The poet's feeling for nature and the human element especially are carefully treated from a pedagogical point of view. American teachers will be interested in comparing the testimony of M. Bezard's advanced pupils as to the effect which the reading of the text has had upon them, with a similar expression from their own students; and, if he finds that on the whole his own boys and girls have not gained the same deep and sympathetic appreciation of Latin literature, he will not attribute it to the superior ability of M. Bezard's pupils, but more probably to the old-world thoroughness which from the beginning to the end characterizes the system of the French schoolmaster.

In conclusion, the striking point of *Comment apprendre le Latin à nos fils* for the American teacher lies, not in the methods presented, but rather in the idea of thus making a serious and painstaking study of the teaching of secondary Latin with the pupils themselves and their reaction to Latin as the basic facts and the classroom as the laboratory. That our traditional system of imposing a certain kind of Latin teaching on boys and girls, regardless of individual capacity and the character of the school and community, is far from ideal, has long been recognized by thoughtful teachers. But the scientific study of the whole question of Latin values based upon the results in the classroom has been left as a rule to the pitiless professor of education. M. Bezard's methods of teaching French boys and girls may not bring ideal results in the American school. Perhaps, however, the idea of making within the profession a practical study of what may actually be accomplished in the teaching of Latin in the various types of American schools may lead us far toward this end.